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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses retention techniques that can be used with minority students at predominantly white colleges, focusing on four phases that are critical to the retention and academic achievement of minority students: acceptance, acclimatization, responsibility, and productivity. In the acceptance phase, the college community should attempt to convince minority students very early that it is interested in them and that help is available for them to maximize their potential. The acclimatization phase involves building a positive racial climate and the incorporation of clearly stated retention policies. To foster minority student responsibility, minority program directors should organize a leadership seminar that addresses the organizational structure of the college and its relationship to the community, profiles an effective leader, parliamentary procedures for conducting an effective meeting, and an overview of management skills. In the productivity phase, the minority networking milieu should endeavor to destroy the stereotypes that hinder acceptance into the mainstream of academic life at white colleges. (Contains 11 references.) (MDM)

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Retention Models for Minority College Students

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Retention Models for Minority College Students

The disruption of segregation in higher education in the '60s stimulated increased enrollment of minority students in predominantly White colleges. However, these colleges appear to limit their emphasis on recruiting minority students with little attention to their *retention* and *academic achievement* (Washington, 1986; Williams, 1987). This nonchalance compounds the multi-dimensional problems of academic and cultural preparations already facing many minority college entrants. As Washington (1986) pointed out, "it does not take long for the underprepared student to recognize his/her deficiency" (p. 47). In addition, Williams (1987) noted that these problems are magnified when some White colleges uncaringly assume that minority students must inevitably fail because of deficiencies directly related to educational quality and equity.

Even though some White colleges have made some efforts to retain minority students, these efforts have not been pragmatically pursued or evaluated. For example, more than a decade ago, Clewell and Ficklen (1986) examined some retention programs and identified some common characteristics of successful retention efforts. These characteristics included the traditional institutional commitment to financial support and remedial education programs. Although such programs are necessary, Clewell and Ficklen ignored the issue of race as a reason for the noncommittal attitude of White colleges and also ignored the importance of the minority networking milieu. No doubt, race continues to matter in today's educational programs (Bell, 1992; Obiakor, 1994; Weis & Fine, 1993; West, 1993), and students' retention continues to be a burning issue in higher education.

Four strategic phases are critical to the retention and academic achievement of minority

students in predominantly White colleges (Obiakor & Lassiter, 1988). According to Obiakor and Lassiter, these phases are acceptance, acclimatization, responsibility, and productivity. In this paper, we discuss important retention techniques that are pertinent to these phases.

The Acceptance Phase

While feelings of acceptance increase retention and positive attitudes needed for academic survival of minority students in predominantly White colleges, feelings of alienation contribute to early attrition. Washington (1986) argued that minority students are generally not privy to backstage information that is more accessible to their White counterparts. White professors tend to maintain a more formal relationship and/or an unfriendly relationship with their minority students which contribute to feelings of alienation.

As means of fitting into the "White" system, the feelings of alienation described above implicitly force minority students to define academic success as White peoples' prerogative, discourage their peers, and perhaps unconsciously "act white" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Although some educators would label the above response as basic inferiority complex, Lassiter (1985) noted that minority students have fewer family members or community role models from which to learn about the university milieu and expectations. Therefore, in the acceptance phase, the college community should convince minority students *very early* that it is interested in them and that help is available for them to maximize their full potential. Frantic efforts should be made to reduce academic racism (Bell, 1992); and proper communication, understanding, and trust should be established to promote feelings of acceptance (Obiakor, 1994).

The Acclimatization Phase

The problem does not end with the acceptance of minority students (Obiakor & Lassiter, 1988). Many minority students get lost in the system because of the lack of detailed information about the resources on the college campus (Brown, 1987). This problem requires the immediate attention of the Minority Program Director. She/he should plan an orientation program or welcome party. Additionally, minority organizations (e.g., fraternities and sororities) should play remarkable roles in socializing the new minority college entrants, and in helping them to develop positive attitudes. For example, minority student organizations should introduce the new entrants to the physical terrain of the campus, including the whereabouts of basic resources such as the library and bookstore (see Obiakor & Lassiter, 1988).

The Minority Program Director should work cooperatively with other retention programs (e.g., Centers for Academic Achievement, Learning Assistance, Counseling and Advising, Financial Aid; and Programs such as The First Start and Special Student Services). Moreover, tutorial services should be provided together with skills needed for time management, studying, note-taking and test-taking.

It is apparent that the acclimatization phase involves building a positive racial climate and the incorporation of clearly stated retention policies. These policies should foster a high level of institutional commitment, dedication, sensitivity and support; systematic monitoring of specialized programs; and positive networking milieu which considers proper communication between the college community and minority students.

The Responsibility Phase

Many minority college students usually have the "me-first" syndrome which overshadows

their responsiveness to the needs of fellow minority students. Because many minorities are first generation college students, they give top priority to getting high paying jobs while overlooking the responsibility phase of college life. These students fail to understand (or are unaware) that responsibility transcends all transactions in life.

To foster minority student responsibility, the Minority Program Director should organize a leadership seminar which addresses the (a) organizational structure of the college and its relationship to the general community, (b) profile of an effective leader, (c) parliamentary procedures for conducting a formal meeting, and (d) overview of management skills. A well-planned leadership seminar should incorporate the following:

- Inviting minority graduate or senior level students to accept leadership roles.
- Assembling a well-prepared package of current leadership materials for later distribution.
- Inviting speakers from minority communities to represent good role models.
- Presenting Certificates of Award to participants.

It is important to note that the responsibility phase puts together responsibilities of minority faculty and students, and the college as a whole.

The Productivity Phase

Leadership seminars are unproductive if nothing positive materializes from them. At this stage, minority faculty and students should begin to ask themselves, "Are we really having our presence felt where it counts on this campus?" In the productivity phase, the minority networking milieu should endeavor to destroy the stereotypes that hinder acceptance into the mainstream of academic life in White colleges. As important elements of the society, minority students need to

direct their energies toward positive productions that would reflect their accurate self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-ideal.

In this productivity phase, both collective and individual approaches are needed (Washington, 1986). The collective approach should require students to become active participants in supportive networking systems and developing institutional mechanisms for the certitude of success in White colleges. The individual approach should focus on (a) seeking to develop a positive self-image, (b) developing an attitude for success, (c) using time effectively, and (d) making effective use of university resources.

Conclusion

In this paper, we discuss the retention and academic achievement of minority students in predominantly White colleges. It is apparent that the disruption of segregation in higher education which stimulated increased minority enrollment has only "scotched the snake, but not killed it." To retain minority students and to assure their academic success, the college community, especially the minority faculty and student populace, must make pragmatic commitments to the acceptance, acclimatization, responsibility and productivity phases.

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